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AP English Language and Composition

Composition: Gender

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Gender

The film industry has mainly classified the conventional gender roles of society into their movies. A majority of films have supported some of the male and female stereotypes. In the history of the film industry, the role of men is primarily the stereotypical working class man or hero, while the roles of women are primarily portrayed as being somewhat inferior to men. In the 1930s through the 1970s, men held the leading roles in films while women played smaller roles. Men were typically employed, successful gentlemen, while the woman’s only job was a housewife. The film industry was mostly dominated by men. In terms of jobs, women were given mostly family roles and rarely were shown outside of their homes, while men had successful careers and did many activities outside of home. “Women were shown doing housework and men were the beneficiaries of their work” (“Women’s roles in the film industry” Women in film). As women were given a more active role in society, the gender roles in movies changed. However, many types of gender stereotypes in films still exist. Action genre movies in particular account for many of the gender stereotypes in the film industry today. Men are typically portrayed to be the hero, while women are often portrayed as sexual objects. In the movie *300*, the Spartan men served and protected the city of Sparta, while the Spartan women did domestic chores and bred more warriors. Because this movie was set back in ancient times, society portrayed men to be superior to women. Some of the main characters in *300* are prime examples for the different gender roles.

King Leonidas is the proud, triumphant King of Sparta. In the film, the character Leonidas can be portrayed as a couple different male stereotypes. King Leonidas is portrayed as the hero throughout the different action sequences. He is often times seen in the film taking charge of his troops and leading them into battle. Leonidas is seen as a hero not only because he is the King of Sparta, but also because he is the commander of the troops. Before King Leonidas leaves for battle with his three-hundred Spartans, he confronts his wife and refrains from saying “My queen, my life, my love,” because he, like all other Spartans, is not soft and does not want to show emotion to his queen (Zack Snyder. 300). The narrator speaks of how Spartan men are raised like brutes and are “hard warriors” (Zack Snyder. 300). This particular phrase is important to the story because it reflects the gender role of men during that time period. King Leonidas can also be classified as the family man stereotype. Throughout the film he is seen training his young son for battle. He plays the role of protector not only for his individual family, but also for Sparta. In the movie *300*, King Leonidas represents many male stereotypes.

In contrast, the character Queen Gorgo stands for many female stereotypes in the movie. The queen portrays the domestic female stereotype. The queen is shown caring for her young son and staying at home while her husband, King Leonidas, is fighting for their country. Like many of the women in the film, Queen Gorgo performs many domestic tasks such as retrieving food and water for her family, as well as looking after her child. Queen Gorgo is also perceived to be a sex object. She is shown in the film being easily seduced by her King. She is also shown bribing one of the councilmen with sex. At times in the film the Queen, among many other women, are shown wearing little clothing. Lastly, the queen represents the female stereotype of beauty. The queen is an attractive woman with a small frame, much like how the media portrays what a woman should look like. Her attractive looks and sexual qualities are a large part of Queen Gorgo’s character. Queen Gorgo represents an abundance of the female stereotypes in society.

The Captain of the Spartan troops also shows male stereotypes. The Captain is a close ally of King Leonidas. Throughout the film, the Captain portrays the male stereotype of being a family man. The Captain’s son, Astinos, is barely old enough to be in battle with the Persians. The Captain is skeptical of allowing his son to enter battle, but decides to encourage him to serve their country. Throughout the different battles with the Persians, the Captain protects his son from harm. When Astinos is killed by Persians, the Captain goes on an extremely violent tirade and kills every Persian in sight due to his strong emotions. After the death of his son, the Captain proclaims to the King that his heart is filled with hate, and King Leonidas replies “Good.” King Leonidas feels that it is necessary for a soldier to feel hatred toward his enemies. This particular scene portrays another male characteristic of not showing emotion towards a certain subject. The Captain is another character that shows the male stereotype present in this film.

Although many of the characters in the movie portray the prevalent male and female stereotypes in society, there are a few characters that stray away from these social formalities. Councilman Theron is an example of one of the characters that does not abide to the brute and warrior stereotypes in the film *300*. Theron is no older than the Spartan men who fight for their city, but he lacks the physical strength that the Spartan warriors possess. Because Theron is not a typical man in Sparta, he wears a gown that is similar to the gowns worn by Spartan women. Along with Councilman Theron, there are other men that are on the council of Sparta. These men are far less in physical size than the Spartan warrior and are given duties that are similar to women. The men in the council are unique to the majority of men in Sparta that serve their city.

There are also some specific scenes in the movie that break some of the male and female stereotypes. Directly after Astinos is killed in battle, the Captain begins to break down and cry. The Captain immediately showed his emotion for the loss of his son. This scene in the movie shows how even the most masculine man has to show some emotion at some point in time. In the end of the battle against the Persians, after King Leonidas has been shot by many arrows, he stands up and shouts, “My queen, my life, my love” (Zack Snyder. 300). This phrase is contradictory to the general actions of Spartans, and men in general, because it shows emotion. Both of these sequences in the film show how every man must show emotion, regardless of who they are.

The movie *300* demonstrated the many male and female stereotypes in society. Although most of the men were relatively similar, there were a few men in Sparta who went against the normal gender role. Like many other action movies, *300* showed various roles that supported some of the gender roles in the film industry. The main characters primarily demonstrated the conventional gender roles, but they also expressed some contradictory qualities. The film industry provides various different types of gender roles through movies.

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